

# SUFFOLK NANSEMOND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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*Kings Fork School on the old Windsor Road in 1924*

## KINGS FORK

Most of the communities in old Nansemond County had an obvious reason for existing—the earliest ones were generally on the water; later there were the railroad towns. Kings Fork is different. The site where the school once stood is now the intersection of Rob's Drive and Kings Fork Road. What is now Rob's Drive was the old Windsor Road.

The neighborhood known as Kings Fork seems to have been geographically spread as far as the Kings Fork School district reached. A school was on that site by the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The school and Providence Methodist Church were the anchors for the surrounding farming community.

The construction date of Kings Fork School is not clear, but we believe that it was there by the late 1880's. Students—elementary through high school—arrived the best way they could, on foot or by horse- (or goat-) drawn cart. Reportedly, one of the early buildings on the campus was a stable.



*Eleanor, Jesse L. and Nell Williams in their school cart. Thanks to Jesse D. Williams.*

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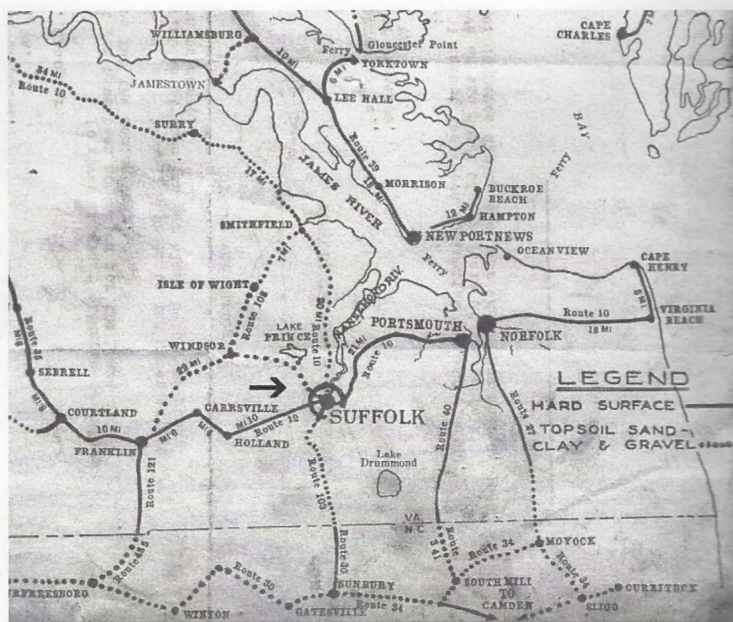


Eventually buses were used and after 1929 students left Kings Fork after elementary school to travel by bus to Chuckatuck for high school. The last Kings Fork High School class graduated 4 students in 1929, with Gibson Pierce being the only boy. The Kings Fork building was used as an elementary school until 1979 and stood for some years afterward.

Many students grew up to farm in the area as their fathers and grandfathers did before them. A few small stores and service stations sprang up in rural neighborhoods. One near the intersection of Providence Road and the present Pruden Boulevard (Rt. 460) was operated by Jesse Norfleet, a Kings Fork boy. Its original site was on the old Windsor Road near the school. When the new highway (Rt. 460) was built, the business was moved to the new highway. One store at the other end of Kings Fork Road at present day Route 10 was called Red Top and though the building is gone, that corner is still known as Red Top.

The school was the center of many community activities for people of all ages. When the Kings Fork Ruritan Club and the Kings Fork Woman's Club started, they used the lunchroom and the auditorium for various functions of their clubs.

Generations of local families attended school at the old site at Robs Drive and Kings Fork Road. However, when three new elementary schools opened in 1979, Kings Fork closed. The importance of the name in the community is illustrated by the fact that two new schools built in recent years carry the name into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.



1927 Chamber of Commerce map. The paved road to Richmond was via Franklin. The arrow indicates the school site.



Maintenance of schools did not appear to be a high priority in this c. 1925 picture taken in front of the old two-story building at Kings Fork. A sign posted to the left reminds the students and teachers that "Typhoid Fever Can Be Prevented." Students are L to R: Back row—George Eure, John Bradshaw, Wellons Wright, Clarke Savage; Middle row—Alice Byrum, (unknown), Ruby Uzzel, Helen Ferguson, Emily Gwaltney, Teacher 7th grade; First row—Willie Rountree, Mary Boothe, Claire Bennett, Edna Horton, Nell Williams.

## Holland Defeats Kings' Fork

HOLLAND, VA., Nov. 16.—The Holland High School basket ball teams today met the lads and lassies of King's Fork High School on the Holland court. As a result the "King's Killed" lads and lassies marched away in defeat to the tune of 7-11 and 18-0.

The fracas opened with the boys taking the initiative. The "Highland" lads falling back undetected by the steady onslaught of the Hollanders. During the last half the Holland substitutes presented the visiting aggregation with a total of seven points. Both teams played hard and several spectacular plays featured the game.

The lassies failed to score throughout their melee. The Holland dames were not as generous as their brothers, refusing to present the visiting lassies with a single point. The feature of this game was the team work of the Holland clan. The scoring was doubtless due, solely to the attraction of a circular object to a circular cavity.

This unusual sports report appeared in the Suffolk Herald, November 25, 1921. Kings Fork had no gymnasium.



A year or two later a group of students poses in front of a newer one-story building. Photos thanks to Charnell Blair and Jesse D. Williams.



# Miss Daisy Nurney (1873-1948)

In the 1890's Miss Daisy Nurney was principal of Kings Fork School. Miss Daisy was born in Rocky Mount, N.C., where her father worked for the railroad, but her family was from Nurneyville in southern Nansemond County. She had attended Nansemond Seminary in Suffolk. Miss Daisy and other teachers at Kings Fork School boarded with local families. She taught in the days when female teachers could not be married. The first Kings Fork School was a wooden building that predated the brick school buildings.

Eventually Miss Daisy moved into the town of Suffolk where she taught and started writing for an early newspaper, the Suffolk Landmark. It was said that Miss Daisy taught with one hand and wrote for the paper with the other, getting news tips from her students.

In 1912 she started working fulltime for The Virginian-Pilot. She was active in many organizations both social and fraternal, as well as the Presbyterian Church. Like some of our readers, she was a member of the Magazine Club and she was an honorary member of the Suffolk Literary Club and the Riverview Garden Club.

Even though she kept up with these and other organizations with which she was involved, she sold ads for the paper and was known for the volume of work she turned out, working from 7:30 a.m. sometimes until midnight. Reportedly she could write an article while selling an ad on the phone and talking to visitors.

She is credited with naming the new club that started in Holland, Virginia, in 1928 "Ruritan." *Information from Carole Maguire's Suffolk Journal, Vol. II.*

The play, "Face at the Window," which was presented at King's Fork on Thursday night by the Senior Class was quite a success.

There will be regular preaching services next Sunday morning at 11 o'clock at Providence. Prayer services at night.

Mr. and Mrs. M. W. Boyce and children, of near Suffolk, spent Sunday with the former's sister, Mrs. R. N. Goodwin and Mr. Goodwin, of this place.

Mr. and Mrs. H. N. Williams and children spent Sunday with Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Williams.

The following program was presented by the Athenian Literary Society of the King's Fork High School on Monday afternoon:

Song—America, by school.

Sentence prayer, by six children.

Lord's Prayer, by school.

Address of Welcome, by Eleanor Williams.

Reading—Our Starving Neighbors, by Madolin Uzzel.

Hymn—Work for the Night is Coming, by school.

Story of the East, by Edith Wills.

Reading—America, America, by Elizabeth Thompson.

Questions and Answers, by Gladys Nelms.

Recitation—Is It Nothing to You, by Ila Twine and Mattie Rountree.

Closing Song, by school.

Mr. and Mrs. H. H. Williams and children have been very sick with the flu, but now are better.

Mr. I. C. Wilkins, of Hampton, spent the week end with his mother, Mrs. H. L. Saunders, and Mr. Saunders.



Students and teachers at Kings Fork Graded School c. 1890. Miss Daisy Nurney is seated amidst the students on the second row to the right of the picture. Picture courtesy Jesse D. Williams

Marie "Big Re" Saunders Jordan, mother of Ritchie and Frank Jordan, housed teachers in the 1930's and 40's at her family home which was demolished when the Rt. 58 Bypass was built.

## KING'S FORK

KING'S FORK—On last Thursday evening a liberty loan meeting was held in the High School auditorium. Interesting speeches were made by Col. R. L. Brewer and Mr. E. H. Hargrave.

Everybody is cordially invited to attend the Chautauqua to be given in the High School auditorium on Friday evening, April 26th, 8 o'clock.

Admission 15 and 25 cents. Refreshments will be served.

After much trouble we have at last secured a new principal, Mr. S. E. Prillaman, of Franklin county.

"Knowledge is Power"

King's Fork Graded School  
Nansemond County, Va.

Report of \_\_\_\_\_  
for the \_\_\_\_\_  
Term beginning October 1, 1892,  
and ending May 1, 1893.

Spelling	Arithmetic
Reading	Physiology
Writing	U. S. Civ. Government
Artistic	Chart Question
Geography	Map Drawing
History	Composition
Algebra	Grammar
Bookkeeping	Deportment

100 is maximum; 85 is good; 75 is minimum.

Daisy D. Nurney, Principal  
Jesse D. Williams, Assistant

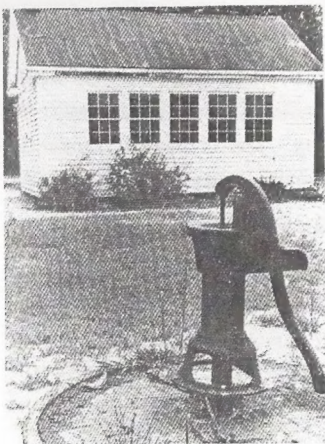
(Above) Excerpt from Suffolk Herald social news from Kings Fork March 24, 1922

(Right) Excerpt from Kings Fork news in Suffolk Herald April 26, 1918. World War I was in full swing and the school was the center of community life.

1892 Report Card from Kings Fork Graded School when Miss Daisy Nurney was Principal. Tobe Gray's daughter Esther earned the exemplary grades shown here.



## Mt. Zion School



In the days of segregation, the old Mt. Zion School stood on the Windsor Road just to the rear of the present school building and near the Mt. Zion Church. It was a two-room frame building that served black students grades 1-7. Those students who wanted (and could afford the time for) a high school education attended East Suffolk High School after finishing at Mt. Zion.

Mrs. Roxie Waters, who was later responsible for some of the good food at Kings Fork School, attended Mt. Zion after her family moved here from Hertford County, North Carolina, in 1927. She remembers two teachers, Mrs. Mildred Luke and Mrs. Carrington. Christina Gray related that students walking to Mt. Zion from Matoaka Road and the surrounding area cut through the Gray farm, as did most of the neighborhood, to take a short cut to the present Pruden Boulevard/Rt. 460 and Mt. Zion School.

The new Mt. Zion School was completed in 1963. When Kings Fork Elementary School closed, Christina Gray, the last principal there, became the principal of Mt. Zion Elementary School.

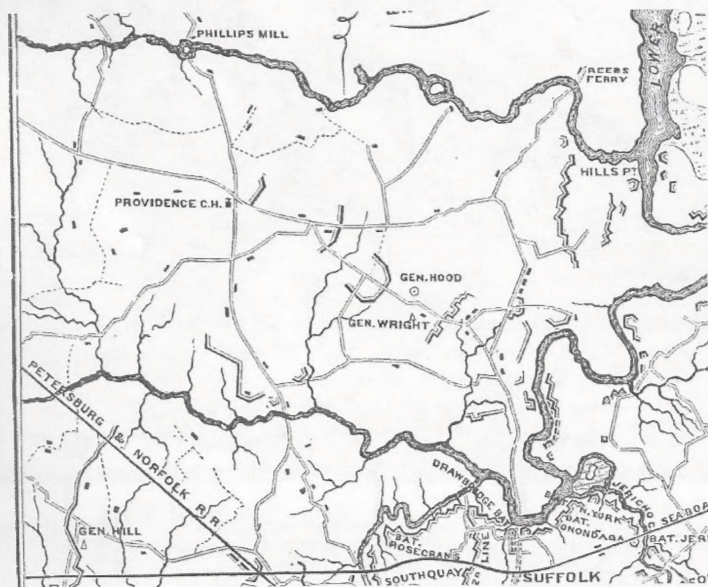
*Little Mt. Zion Elementary School on Route 460 was five miles west of Suffolk. Built in 1875 as a one-room school for black children, an addition was not constructed until 1912. In 1963 this school was replaced with a larger facility called Mt. Zion Elementary on the same property. The original building is no longer standing. Courtesy Ruby Holland Walden. With permission from Suffolk—A Pictorial History by Hobbs and Paquette*

## Providence Church

Before Kings Fork School, Providence Methodist Church was the landmark in the area shown on many 19th century maps. It started in 1827 at a camp meeting on Pitchkettle Road at Murphy's Mill Road. Michael Murphy was the guiding force. A Mr. Goodson gave the land at the present site for a chapel and the first building was built on the present site soon after the camp meeting.

According to a Providence Church history:

"the Church was visited by circuit riders and revivals were held every year until the war of 1861-65. It grew in strength and influence in the community; and in addition to having a Sabbath school . . . it had a day school. Jack and Charles E. Sumner and Stephen Archer taught at the place for several years."



*Civil War map as seen in Storm Over Suffolk, available at the Train Station*

It appears that the Providence Church School preceded Kings Fork School.

Before the War Between the States, master and slave both attended Providence Church, with a separate section for the slave. Even after the war people of color attended revivals at Providence Church until they eventually had a church of their own.

Providence Church was in a dangerous spot during the war, especially during 1862 and 1863 when the Federals held Suffolk and fighting was going on all around the old town. Providence was used as a hospital for troops for a while and as a stable for a while. Toward the end of the century the church received money from the federal government for damages and they used it for repairs and improvements.

In the summer of 1865, just a short time after the surrender at Appomattox, the people of Providence invited Dr. William Brock Wellons, a minister of the Christian Church and former Confederate chaplain, to conduct services at the church. Dr. Wellons had started and pastored churches all over the county and was very well known (Wellons Street in the old City is named for him). A great revival was held and "there was a great reawaking in the life of the church" (to quote the Church history).

It is interesting to note that the same history points out that during the war, the other two churches in the general area—Western Branch Baptist and Bethlehem Christian—had been destroyed or rendered unusable. We can only assume that Providence Church provided a place for gathering and worship until the other churches were rebuilt.

Some years later a group of men from the church—F. N. "Tobe" Gray, Tazewell Saunders, Hugh Williams and Robert Wright—approached Richard Peele and asked him to donate land to enlarge the churchyard. This he did, the land having ultimately come from his father-in-law, Mr. Goodson, who gave the original land.

The original church was then enlarged and improved. A Ladies Aid Society was formed and the ladies saw to furnishing the inside of the building. Before the vestibule was added, there were two front doors, one for men and one for women. Men sat on the left and women sat on the right. Heat was provided by a wood stove and light by oil lamps.

The pews on the extreme right near the front were used by the older ladies of the church. The church history mentions Fletcher Nelms Butler and Wortley Bartlett Nelms. The Amen Corner on the extreme left was occupied by the old men of the church—F. N. "Tobe" Gray, Tazewell Saunders, Cornelius Wright and later Leonard W. Williams.

Additions have been built through the years, of course, along with modernizations. A parsonage has been built next door and Providence now has a fulltime minister of its own. Many of the same family names that appeared on the roster 100 years ago are still on the church rolls today. *Information from various histories of the church provided by Penny Sherard.*





*Kings Fork Women's Club members prepare a meal in the kitchen of the new clubhouse c. 1964. L-R: Mrs. Clifton Holland, Mrs. Clark Savage, Mrs. Robert Norfleet, Mrs. Richard Williams, Mrs. Edgar Savage, Mrs. Horace Oliver, Mrs. R. A. Daughtrey and Mrs. J. E. Gardner. Picture thanks to Marie Bowman*

## Kings Fork Woman's Club

In 1948 a group of women from the Kings Fork community gathered to make a plan for a new organization—they wanted a Woman's Club. In February of 1949 they called a meeting of local women to be held at Providence Methodist Church. Seventeen women attended, becoming charter members. The Woman's Club was granted a charter the next month.

This already busy group of (mostly) farmers' wives became even busier conducting art contests at Kings Fork School (and later at Mt. Zion), furnishing books for the school libraries, holding school parties and, eventually, offering scholarships in the area (still being given).

The Home Life and Arts and Crafts Departments through the years have given members information for their health and well-being and an outlet for their own skills and artistry.

For years the group met at Providence Methodist Church fellowship hall. In the 1960's the women teamed up with the Kings Fork Ruritan Club (their husbands, in many cases) to build the Kings Fork Community House, another newer landmark, at the intersection of Providence Road and Kings Fork Road. Both groups continue to meet there today.

*Thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Richard Williams, charter members of the two clubs, who provided the club histories.*

## Kings Fork Ruritan Club

Just months after the Woman's Club was chartered in 1949, the men in the community gathered to form a Ruritan Club. When the charter was received, forty-eight men were present and became charter members. For the next fourteen years they met at Kings Fork School lunchroom, Providence Methodist Church or Western Branch Baptist Church.

In 1963 the Kings Fork Community House was built on land provided by P. D. Pruden and with the hard work and planning of the Kings Fork Ruritan and Woman's Clubs.

Kings Fork Ruritans have supported the Nansemond Suffolk Rescue Squad, the American Red Cross, the Homeless Shelter, the Salvation Army, Suffolk Youth Athletic Association (a fairly recent fixture in the Kings Fork Community), the Cheer Fund and many other worthy community causes. The Club has also provided years of good fellowship for the men of the area.



*Womanless Wedding at Kings Fork School 1950, an early fund raiser by the Kings Fork Ruritan Club. Bride-Judge N. T. Gray, Groom-Shirley Wooster, Flower girl with very short dress and very long legs-John Henry Powell. Others are Sam Oliver, Richard Williams, Pressley Smith, Eugene Holloway, M. E. Joyner, Nat Clements, William Norfleet, Tom Saunders, Jesse Williams, Mike Wright, H. E. Williams, M. O. Whitley, Edward Rountree, Earle Dale, Lyman Pierce, Robert Powell, H. P. Johnson, H. G. Presson, Charles Williams, Henry Wills, T. J. Ashburn, Walter Eley, Ritchie Jordan, J. E. Gardner, W. E. Ellis, R. H. Archer, R. A. Daughtry, Nat Gray, Milford White. Thanks to Jesse D. Williams and Christina Gray.*



# Indian Point Farm

Fredrick N. "Tobe" Gray (1847-1921) was reared in Isle of Wight County near Benn's Church. He was a farmer and an early peanut buyer for Gwaltney-Bunkley Peanut Company in Smithfield. Tobe bought three parcels of land in the Kings Fork area in 1883. Nansemond County was a good place for an ambitious hardworking young man. There was an abundance of farmland, a busy port at Suffolk and two or three railroads with more to come.



*Aerial view of Indian Point Farm taken in the 1940's. Most of the outbuildings are more or less contemporary with the 1779 farmhouse that once stood here. The large barn noted here was taken apart and reconstructed at Hope Plantation near Windsor, N.C.*

He and his wife, the former Mary Anna Marshall, moved into a house built in 1779 on the Kitchen-Nelms tract and reared their five children there. The family attended Providence Church and the children attended Kings Fork School. The farm was called Indian Point by the locals, apparently because the Nansemonds were said to have gathered to trade at a finger of the Nansemond River that came into the back of the farm.

The children grew up on the farm. The three daughters married, Eula Virginia to J. F. Joyner, Lillian to E. E. Edwards and Essie to M. M. Watkins. One son, Fredrick, moved to Lumberton, N.C., but the other son, Nathaniel, stayed on the farm. He became a Justice of the Peace and, of course, farmed the land.

Tobe Gray died in 1921. The next year Nathaniel and his wife demolished the old house and built a larger, modern house in its place. It had one of the first Delco systems for making electricity in the area. Nathaniel and his family attended Providence Church and his one child, Nathaniel "Nat," Jr., attended Kings Fork School. Nathaniel Gray, Sr. farmed and acquired more land including the interestingly named School House Tract near

old Kings Fork School. (That tract with its big old pecan trees is near the entrance to Lake Prince Woods.)

Nathaniel Gray's life took a surprising turn in 1927 when he was named Judge of the newly created Trial Justice Court. He also continued to farm. He retired as judge in 1949 and died in 1961.

In 1958 Nat married Christina Krise whom he met while she was working at Camp Matoaka. They lived at the Norfleet farm for a while in an antebellum farmhouse, then moved to the Gray homeplace. They attended Providence Church and had one son, Nathaniel T. "Tommy," III, who attended Kings Fork School for a time. The Gray family put the last period on the story of old Kings Fork School. After three generations of Grays attended the school, Christina Gray was the principal when the doors closed for the last time.

The Grays are gone now—Nat has passed away and his widow and their son have moved to new homes in other states. The farm, like many others, has been sold for development. Judge Gray's 1922 farm house is being dramatically enlarged and readied for a new chapter in the story of Indian Point Farm.



*The Norfleet House. Nat and Christina Gray lived here when they were first married. This is now the site of Kings Fork Middle School.*

According to Ritchie Jordan, Kings Fork was named for a King family who lived in that area. He was told this by his mother, Marie Saunders Jordan, who was born and raised nearby.

On account of the rainy weather there was no prayer meeting at Providence on Sunday night. There will be a meeting on next Sunday night. The Civic League met Thursday night at King's Fork. A very good program was presented by the school children and various business matters were taken up. Refreshments were served by the patrons.

*Excerpt from Suffolk Herald social news from Kings Fork November 25, 1921.*





*Coming from swimming pool c. 1960. Lois McIlwain, waterfront staff member, leads the way. The building shown was the only enclosed building at camp.*



*The original swimming pool at Matoaka had wooden sides and a mud bottom and was fed by the Nansemond River. This was prior to the creation of the Western Branch Reservoir. The girls in the canoe are being certified for canoeing in Lake Prince.*

In 1965 Nat Gray opened Indian Point Stables. This enabled Camp Matoaka to offer an equestrian unit using the horses at Indian Point.

Compliments of  
**WILLIE POWELL**  
CONAN BEACH

*Ad from 1940 playbill at Kings Fork School. Mr. Powell and his wife operated a small general store on Pitchkettle Road at Conan Beach. This was the approximate site of Jarnegan's Bridge, the location of the first courthouse for Nansemond County.*

## Camp Matoaka

Camp Matoaka was a Girl Scout camp on 90 acres on Lake Prince. It was in operation from the 1930's to 1981. Matoaka was Pocahontas' middle name and Matoaka Road, previously the Avenue, took the name of the camp.

Georgie "Buck" Harris was affiliated with the camp—mostly as director—for most of its existence. She came to know and befriend girls all over the Tidewater area. She was a friend of the local economy, too, buying all supplies in Suffolk and hiring people in the immediate vicinity to do seasonal work at Matoaka.

Christine Krise came to camp on the bus from downtown Norfolk as a young teenager and fell in love with the quiet natural beauty of Camp Matoaka. She was a camper for several years, then one of Buck Harris' counselors. After college she went to work at the Girl Scout office in Norfolk and was Buck's assistant at the camp. She met her future husband, Kings Fork native Nat Gray, while she was working at the camp.

Camp Matoaka is gone now. The remnants of the camp have been removed. However, many women, former Girl Scouts, have happy memories of summer days and nights at Camp Matoaka. *Information thanks to Christina Gray.*

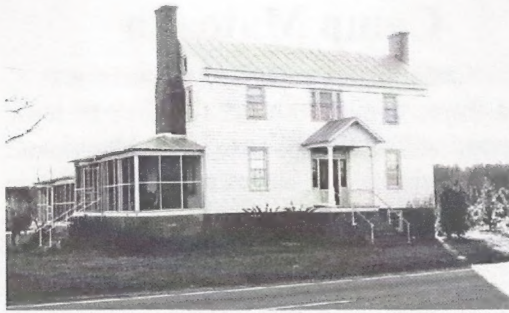
## SYAA

Suffolk Youth Athletic Association was started in the early 1980's by a group of generous businessmen who wanted more opportunities for youth all over Suffolk to participate in organized sports. Through the years thousands of young people have played baseball, softball, soccer and field hockey on the fields on Kings Fork Road.



*Conan Beach was a popular spot on Pitchkettle Road in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It was near Lake Cohoon on the Nansemond River before Lake Meade was formed.*





## The Eley House on the Windsor Road

This is certainly a familiar sight to folks who travel from Suffolk to Windsor or beyond on Route 460. The owners, Steve and Jan Rountree Augustine, tell us that Thomas Godwin built the house in 1826 on 25 acres acquired from Richard

Godwin. Samuel Eley owned the house from 1833 until 1883—longer than any other owner until Mrs. Augustine's family. Neighborhood tradition held that the Union Army burned the house to the ground. During part of the war the area was a no-man's land where fighting might erupt at any time. However, the owners tell us that old tax records indicate that the house remained, though it might have suffered damage.

Solomon Saunders bought the house from Samuel Eley's estate in 1883 and sold it to William Nelson Camp in 1890. Although Camp and his family moved to Florida the next year, he did not sell the house until 1907. After two other owners, the property was sold to Mrs. Augustine's grandfather, G. T. Rountree, Sr., in 1924. *Information and photo thanks to Jan and Steve Augustine.*

*Note: William Nelson Camp is one of the Franklin Camps, founders of the mill that now is owned by International Paper. William Nelson Camp married Texanna Gay whose father, William Henry Gay, built the Suffolk and Carolina Railroad. That's the railroad that we follow on the model at the Train Station. For more about the Camps and the Gays and their railroad and lumber business, read Timber Tycoons by Parke S. Rouse, Jr., available at the Train Station.*

## Hurricane Branch (1856 – 1949)



"Hurricane" Branch ready for a chase after a fugitive, from the *Suffolk News* early in the 20th century.

When Fredrick N. "Tobe" Gray died in 1921, he was buried at Cedar Hill Cemetery. Of course, men who were his friends and neighbors served as pallbearers. They were as follows: J. H. Norfleet, C. M. Wright, McKim Nelms, Thomas J. Saunders, Elvin B. Gardner, Willie A. Lassiter, L. W. Williams and John J. S. Branch. Many of these were long-time locals, we believe, but one relative newcomer was especially interesting.

John J. S. "Hurricane" Branch was born in 1856 in Charles City County where his father was overseer at Shirley Plantation. Branch's mother died when he was three and soon thereafter the War Between the States disrupted life. Branch was 18 before he received any schooling.

He married a Nansemond County girl, farmed in Isle of Wight, then moved to Nansemond County to what is now Mockingbird Lane in 1888. He was soon appointed High Constable of the Chuckatuck Magisterial District, a job he held for decades.

Life on Clay Hill Road (Mockingbird Lane) must have been too tame. In the 1890's he decided to work bloodhounds. He became "Hurricane Branch," a well-known bloodhound detective. He worked on cases all over Virginia, as well as in Maryland, West Virginia and North Carolina.

One regionally famous murder mystery took place in Elizabeth City, N.C., in 1901 when a girl named Nell Cropsey disappeared. Hurricane Branch and the dogs were called in. Bland Simpson wrote a "nonfiction novel" about the case. This excerpt from that 1993 book gives an idea about the man:

"By the time the morning train . . . had pulled to a stop . . . a town crowd had already turned out, curious to see what sort of man their popular police chief had telegraphed off for and to see what sort of dogs that man would bring with him.

There was no mistaking any other Norfolk and Southern passenger for Hurricane Branch, who wore a blue black wool uniform with small brass buttons. Across his front was a brace of pistols." From *The Mystery of Beautiful Nell Cropsey* What a colorful addition to Suffolk/Nansemond County life he must have been!



Nansemond-Suffolk Academy was started in downtown Suffolk in 1966 with seven grades. In 1970 the school was enlarged to include 12 grades when they moved to a new building on site in the Kings Fork community.

The campus has been enlarged and buildings have been added to include about 100 acres and more than 1,000 students in pre-school through 12. This is now one of five schools in walking distance (or a short pony cart ride) of the old Kings Fork School site.

## A Generous Man



PETER DEWITT PRUDEN SR.

P. D. Pruden (1887-1972), an Isle of Wight native, was one of several up and coming men who lived and worked at Kimberly (more about that area another time) but his name cannot be omitted when we speak of Kings Fork. Around 1956 Pruden bought Idlewood Farm on the Windsor Road. He and builder Marvin Whitley developed the Idlewood neighborhood around Providence Church. He gave the land for the Kings Fork Community House built by the Ruritans and the Woman's Club.

Pruden offered part of Idlewood Farm as a site for a community college. When another site was chosen, he gave the land for Pruden Vocational Technical Center and later more land was given for the Tri-County Occupational Center (now closed). The Windsor Road (Rt. 460) is now Pruden Boulevard to the Isle of Wight County line. It is a fitting tribute to a generous man.





Jesse Norfleet's Providence Esso. Picture from *Suffolk in Vintage Postcards*. Norfleet, though crippled from birth, was active in community life.

DeLane, Travis and Jesse Williams (right) posed in the 1950's on the swing cart hauling peanut shocks. Children were not strong enough to operate this equipment. Both brothers are now farmers, like their father and grandfather before them. Picture thanks to Jesse D. Williams.



Pur Sang Dairy Farm was operated by the Richard Williams family on Kings Fork Road for more than 45 years, starting in 1946. They were named Suffolk's Farm Family of the Year in 1988, a distinction also held by a few other families in the neighborhood.

## The Meatpacking Business

Ah! There's nothing as delicious as a good country cured ham. P. D. Pruden had his smokehouse at Kimberly but there were meat packers in the Kings Fork neighborhood as well. Chesley Powell and his brother Allie had a smokehouse on Pitchkettle Road

near the intersection of Lake Kilby Road. For a while Chesley was also in business with Jesse L. Williams, Sr. At some point their nephew Gibson Pierce built a smokehouse a few doors away. He, like his uncles, produced everything from the pig from Virginia hams to chitterlings and souse, according to Mrs. Gibson Pierce. The Pierce building still stands at 1614 Pitchkettle Road and now houses a cabinet shop.

Phone 2365-W-1  
Suffolk, Va. \_\_\_\_\_ 19\_\_

IN ACCOUNT WITH  
Chesley R. Powell  
Virginia Cured Hams and Bacon

NAME	
SHOULDERS	
SIDES	
TOWLS	
SAUSAGE	
BONE	
LOINS	

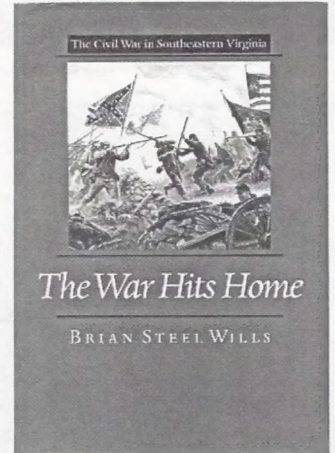
Receipt from Chesley R. Powell's meatpacking business. Information thanks to Doris Powell.

## A Bit of Celebrity

The farming community of Kings Fork is not without a few claims to fame and brushes with celebrity. One Kings Fork native Delores "Dee Dee" Clements Darden grew up across from Jesse Norfleet's store. She tells that Jesse's was the neighborhood gathering spot. He had one of the first televisions in the area and the men all gathered to watch the fights. One time Duncan Renaldo, the Cisco Kid of television fame, stopped at Jesse's service station and Jesse had a picture to prove it.

Agriculture has long been the economic backbone of the Kings Fork community and several area people have held leadership positions. Among them are Dee Dee Darden (now of Isle of Wight County), first Chairman of the National Peanut Board; Ritchie Jordan, state Pork Council President, Director from Virginia on the National Pork Board, and first Chairman of the National Pork Producers Legislative Committee; Ritchie's wife Mildred Carter Jordan, two-term President of the National Porkettes, and first woman on the National Pork Producers Council Legislative Committee; Ritchie's brother Frank, appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to the Virginia Farm Service Agency; and Jesse Williams and Tommy Rountree, both Presidents of the Virginia Peanut Growers Association.

In a different vein, local boy Brian Steel Wills, who teaches at the University of Virginia, Wise Campus, has published a number of books of history, most notably for our purposes, *The War Hits Home*, about the Civil War in Nansemond County and the surrounding area.



## Kings Fork School in the 1960's

Sylvia Pond lived in Suffolk in the 1960's when she taught at Kings Fork School. Like many families in those days, the Ponds had only one car. Sylvia rode to work with Mary (Mrs. Lawrence) Butler, another Kings Fork teacher. Today's teachers might consider the conditions at the school primitive but would envy the warm friendly community that existed.

Sylvia's classroom was on the front of the two-story building. The class on the back of the building had to use the fire escape to come and go unless it was raining, in which case they tiptoed through Sylvia's room. No one batted an eye.

Lunch was in the wooden building (possibly the original school) across the schoolyard. Food, prepared by a Mrs. Pierce and her assistant, Mrs. Roxie Waters, was delicious, especially the homemade bread. The lunchroom made a profit during Sylvia's time and the school used that profit to hire Linda Walter part-time as the first secretary for the school.

The only restrooms were in the one-story brick building that had once been the high school. In Sylvia's day that building housed the sixth and seventh grades and the principal's office. Although the school lacked many things considered essential today, the students and teachers at Kings Fork found a happy place for learning.



# Memories from the 2007 Christmas Tour



*Clockwise, from top left: guests in the Pond-Harrell dining room; lamppost at the Whitfield-Walker house; NSA student Bracey Parr playing his clarinet; hostess Stephanie Williams in the Shotton-Gersbach dining room; the popular Sugar Plum Kitchen; Fred Quayle on his back porch; entry hall in the Butler-Harrell house; and center: hostess Becky Habel at the Pond-Ferguson house. Photos by Julie Johnson and Steve Jackson.*



Thanks to all who helped and especially to:

- our homeowners: Mr. & Mrs. Grier Ferguson, Mr. and Mrs. Marcus Gersbach, Mr. and Mrs. John Harrell, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Harrell, Sen. and Mrs. Fred Quayle, Dr. and Mrs. Miley Walker
- Bradshaw's Picture Frame Shop
- Jesse Lindsey of Suffolk-News Herald
- Marcie Miller of Uniquely Leo's
- Amy Wiegand of The Prints and the Papers
- Stephanie Williams of Southern Interiors
- All chairmen
- Decorators, hosts and hostesses
- Musicians
- Bakers for the Sugar Plum Kitchen
- NSA Student Historical Society



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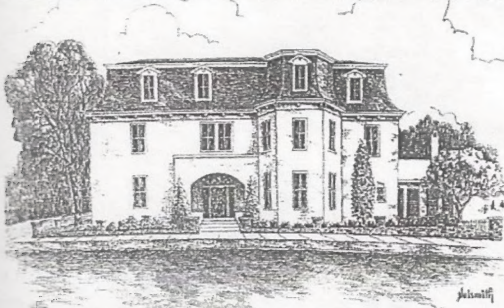
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In Honor of Sue Woodward

- to Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society from Joann S. Hunter

To Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society from  
Board Members of Western Tidewater Free Clinic

To Thomas Allison's Eagle Project of  
reconstructing the pergola at the Dawson House:

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• • • • • Additional copies of this newsletter are •  
• • • • • for sale at the Train Station. •  
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Thomas Allison (middle row, fourth from left) and other members of Boy Scout Troop 1 pose in front of the reconstructed pergola, his Eagle project built February 16, 2008.

• • • • • Have you renewed your SNHS membership for 2008? •  
• • • • • If not, please do. We don't want you to miss a single •  
• • • • • issue of our newsletter. •  
• • • • •





**May Day at King's Fork school 1954.** Boy in cowboy hat (#6 from L.), Jimmy Gardner; prince & princess to R. of queen, Gene Ellis and Eleanor Powell; queen, Josie Ann Underwood, and king, Hugh Whitley; princess to L. of king & back beside the bush—Mary Ainslie Saunders, with prince, Howard Council; little girl wearing hearts, Dirran Savage. In R. foreground, Willie Williams (blond) and Lindsey Mincher. The farmhouse in far right background is that of Mr. and Mrs. Rob Wright (of Rob's Drive). The outbuildings are gone and the farmland has been developed but the house still stands. A sharp eye noted that the field is being worked with a mule and plow. *Information thanks to Mary Ainsley Saunders Latimer, Sue Copeland Williams and Jesse D. Williams.*

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*Mrs. Mary Butler with class in 1950's in front of the newer one-story building. Thanks to Jesse D. Williams (1st row, second from left).*